

EDUCATORS AND INDUSTRY PUSH FOR SCIENCE FUNDING

By Catherine Williams
STATE HOUSE NEWS SERVICE

STATE HOUSE, BOSTON, FEB. 25, 2008....To keep the state's life sciences workforce growing, science education advocates said Monday they will continue to pitch lawmakers for funding to train teachers in science and provide more lab equipment to schools.

In 2007, the Massachusetts Biotechnology Education Foundation won \$1.2 million in combined industry and state funding for its high school science education program. Keeping pace with countries like China that produce thousands of degreed scientists annually is a big challenge for the Bay State, according to one industry report.

The foundation is hoping lawmakers will continue funding its MassBio Teach program over the next two to three years, said Lance Hartford, executive director of MassBioEd. MassBio Teach reaches 113 public high schools and 20,000 students, he said. The goal is to reach 370 high schools.

"High school is the last opportunity to get students interested in the life sciences," said Hartford. Getting students interested in science early means they are more likely to take up careers in scientific fields. The program trains biotechnology and science-focused teachers and guidance counselors, and pays for new lab equipment.

With investment from the state, the life sciences industry has the "potential to grow by thousands of jobs in the near future" and could spur growth in manufacturing jobs in Massachusetts, said House Speaker Salvatore DiMasi. DiMasi said House lawmakers will debate their version of a 10-year, \$1 billion life sciences bill on Wednesday.

"The plan is something we can all be proud of," said DiMasi, who added he believes the bill will have overwhelming support in the House.

Mass Insight Corporation released a report Monday that predicts Massachusetts won't reach its full job growth potential unless it invests in developing kindergarten through high school science curriculum. China will generate 11,000 life sciences Ph.D.s in 2015, compared to 400 produced by Massachusetts annually, according to the report.

Founded in 2001, MassBioEd is a nonprofit organization aimed at furthering science and biotechnology education in Massachusetts. Under MassBio Teach, participating schools receives grants of up to \$14,000 for lab equipment and supplies. The program also trains science teachers in partnership with institutions including the Museum of Science Boston and Framingham State College. The state contributed \$750,000 to the program, said Hartford.

MassBioEd lists the Massachusetts Biotechnology Council as its biggest corporate sponsor. The council contributed \$500,000. AstraZeneca PLC contributed \$75,000. Representatives from both organizations were on hand during an event Monday where teachers displayed test-tube experiments used in MassBio Teach classrooms.

In addition to DiMasi, the event drew an audience of lawmakers including Rep. Michael Rodrigues (D-Westport), Rep. Paul Donato (D-Medford), and Rep. William Brownsberger (D-Belmont).

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